

PR-15 Citizen Participation

1. Summary of citizen participation process/Efforts made to broaden citizen participation Summarize citizen participation process and how it impacted goal-setting

Analysis to Impediments

Prior to beginning the 2015- 2019 Consolidated Plan process, the City of Evansville contracted with the Indiana Association of Community and Economic Development (IACED). The city contracted with IACED in order to prepare the 2015-2019 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. IACED obtained public input by conducting interviews with various agencies, holding a public meeting to discuss fair housing issues, and meeting with Evansville Housing Authority voucher residents.

Public Notice was posted in the Evansville Courier that the City of Evansville would be holding two Public Forums concerning the 2015-2019 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI), on Wednesday, January 22, 2014. The main goal at the forum was to encourage public participation and suggest ways which the various players in the housing industry in Evansville may improve access to safe, decent, affordable housing for all Evansville residents over the next five years.

The meetings were held at Central Library, 200 SE Martin Luther King Dr. at the following times: 1:00-3:00 p.m., in Browning Room B and 7:00-8:00 p.m., in Browning Room A. All interested parties were encouraged to attend one of the two meetings to address community concerns involving fair housing choice. Surveys were available at the meetings and online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LFYSJPK> to confidentially identify some of the concerns. All information about the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing was published in El Informador Latino and a blog post.

The AI revealed findings and recommended strategies that are intended to consolidate the barriers to fair housing. Stakeholders and citizens alike agreed that the lack of affordable housing was still the major impediment in Evansville. Substandard housing and a lack of low-income housing in certain areas were also mentioned frequently. With increased collaboration among the various service providers in Evansville, the City of Evansville could ensure that funds are being allocated more efficiently to meet direct needs.

Some of the comments raised during the public comment period, and during the public hearing, were not addressed in the final analysis of impediments to fair housing. Several of those comments are provided below. They illustrate that there are certain classes of people in Evansville that feel like their housing rights have been violated but that filing a complaint would make very little difference. All comments were communicated to relevant agencies and organizations involved in housing activities in the city:

“It should be noted that the definition of “family” in the code should be changed or eliminated all-together because zoning law has no place in describing persons’ relationships or living arrangements.”

“There should be a job component for minorities and local residents tied to new projects like the convention hotel.”

“Evansville needs to convene a group to work on housing ex-offenders.”

“It is good that the government tries to communicate with the Latino population in Evansville, but many people abuse us when we rent an apartment here.”

“All underrepresented populations in this area need someone to listen to us at the government level. The government needs to know when people are mistreated.”

“Discrimination complaints are not taken seriously, they’re not investigated, by the Evansville Housing Authority.”

Citizens Participation Process

A description of the citizen participation process and the efforts to broaden public participation is described in the sections below. The City of Evansville held six advertised public meetings specifically focused on the Consolidated Plan and made the plan available for public comment. All meetings were advertised in minority newspapers, including HOLA and Our Times. The meetings were also advertised in the Evansville Courier and Press. All meetings were held in an ADA-accessible meeting space.

Citizen participation was achieved through several methods during the consolidated planning process. Most of the elements in the plan are designed to benefit low and moderate income populations in the City of Evansville. However, the Consolidate Planning process also affords the City an opportunity to strengthen its partnership with other governmental and private sector entities. The goal is to provide a plan that helps establish and maintain a suitable living environment for, and extend economic opportunities to, all residents.

The City encouraged participation in the planning process from all residents. Most all participants at our meetings were low and moderate income people. Residents of slum and blighted areas had the chance to participate through the Blight Elimination Program. Other low income residents of targeted revitalization areas also contributed during the AI process. Based on comments during those meetings, the Evansville Housing Authority now distributes flyers instructing citizens how to file fair housing complaints.

The City meets with agencies regularly, summons requests for proposals (RFP's) from those agencies, and conducts open meetings for citizens to gather and comment. The planning process began with notification to these agencies, and other interested parties in the local newspaper in April 2014. Ten (10) days after the consolidated plan survey became available online at www.evansville.in.gov, the City held the first of six public meetings to obtain citizen input. The following questions and comments from citizens who attended the planning meetings illustrate how engaged local Evansville residents have become:

"How is the info obtained from the online survey used in the consolidated plan?"

"Will the Con Plan explain how to qualify for CDBG funds?"

"We have a growing need for placement of incarcerated individuals. Will the Con Plan address that need?"

"Please explain the HUD income guidelines."

"Will the Con Plan address the needs of the Latino residents in Evansville?"

Throughout the planning process, it became obvious that the residents of Evansville are heavily invested in the way the City allocates tax dollars over the next 5 years. Part of the City's job is to ensure the residents don't have misperceptions about what the City can and cannot accomplish. Given that there will be a 15% decrease in the 2015 CDBG funds to the City of Evansville, some agency representatives and local residents were dismayed at these public meetings. And given that the reduction in funding would translate to reduced outreach, the City understands these concerns. Some residents had the following negative feedback to share:

"Why aren't all neighborhoods a part of the revitalization process? It seems like the City chooses only certain favorites."

"We need more job fairs. We need a way to create jobs immediately."

"Blight owners are not maintaining their properties."

"The arts district needs trolleys."

"Does the Con Plan address discrimination against transgender individuals who aren't a protected class?"

In order to boost community participation further and to educate all local citizens, the mayor of Evansville currently holds a series of town hall meetings called, "community conversations". During these meetings, residents have the opportunity to speak with the mayor and voice their concerns. There have been six community conversations; one for

each ward in Evansville. The June 25, 2014 town hall was devoted entirely to the consolidated planning process. All public meetings are held in places that allow for easy access for individuals with disabilities. Participation has been overwhelming.

Citizens Advisory Council

Citizen participation also occurs in public service allocations. To this end, the Mayor appoints a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). The goal of the committee is to ensure that the funded programs represent the needs of the community. There are nine members on the council. The Mayor appoints two members. Another two members are representatives of the United Way Allocations Committee. The remaining five members are neighborhood representatives.

The allocation process is complex and begins when DMD issues a request for proposal (RFP) from various agencies. Notification is given through advertisement in local newspapers and direct mailings to public service agencies and other interested parties. During this time, DMD Development staff meets with all applicants to ensure eligibility. Once the RFP process closes, proposals are accepted, printed, and bound for distribution.

Next, the CAC is appointed. Public hearings are held where applicants may present their proposals. At this time, CAC makes their funding recommendation at a public meeting open to all the public. These recommendations are sent to the Mayor who then makes his own recommendation on funding. City Council members receive both the Mayor's recommendation and the CAC's recommendation on funding. A separate hearing is held to allow applicant agencies to address council members and present their proposals. During the final stage of the process, council allocates CDBG, ESG, and HOME funds.

Comment Period

The City provided a thirty (30) day comment period in which citizens were able to provide their comments and views on the consolidated plan. The public comment period ended on October 22, 2014. Citizens were encouraged to provide input on the community development and housing priority needs by taking an online survey located on the city website www.evansville.in.gov. Questions and concerns were directed to executive director, Kelley Coures. Technical assistance was provided to all groups with disadvantages.